

Exiled Poetics Glück, Darwish, and A Transnational Edenic Imagination

Megan Davis

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Résumé de l'article

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Guided by the poetic explorations of Eden and exile by Glück and Darwish, I work to consider how poetry itself becomes a hybrid site of belonging. The hope is that, through a deep (re)reading of the verses in which Glück and Darwish employ Eden as a metaphor, poetic inquiry might provide a way for us to more fully traverse categories of life, death, time, longing, space, and culture, exploring the complex matrices of our human experience and pursuit of home.

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EXILED POETICS: GLÜCK, DARWISH, AND A TRANSNATIONAL EDENIC IMAGINATION

Megan Davis

Teachers College, Columbia University

med2240@tc.columbia.edu

Megan Davis is a doctoral student in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. As an English teacher she developed a love for creative writing, contemporary poetry, and dialogic classrooms. Meg is interested in poetry pedagogy, poetic inquiry, and practices that invite poetics more effectively and wholeheartedly into the English classroom.

Abstract: Taking up the writings of Louise Glück and Mahmoud Darwish, this essay (re)searches the place and potential of a transnational, Edenic imagination as a vision of belonging amidst the alienation of modern life. Where a transnational poetics rejects ossified borders and boundaries, seeking porosity and imaginative possibilities that work across, around, through, and in-between, an Edenic imagination embraces a consciousness that simultaneously holds holy memory alongside longing for transcendence; so too do these ways of reading and seeing refract in the art-making I attempt as I seek the invisible web of connective, human tissue present in the poetic renderings of Eden by Glück and Darwish. As forces of modernity, colonization, and globalization maim and sever, a transnational, Edenic imagination gives language and location to our thirst for sacred inhabitation. As a method of inquiry, such a reading invites both researcher and reader to dwell in the liminal space of poetics.

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Keywords: poetics; transnational poetics; Edenic imagination; poetic inquiry; Darwish; Glück

If God has punished Adam by driving him out of eternal life into time, then the earth is exile and history a tragedy. It began with a family quarrel between Cain and Abel, then developed into civil wars, regional wars and global wars, which are continuing until history's descendants have wiped out history. So what's next? What comes after history? It seems that the right of return to paradise is encompassed by nothingness and divine mysteries. The only smooth road is the road to the abyss, until further notice ... until the issuing of a divine pardon.

— “Right of return to paradise,” Darwish (2009, p. 109)

Jahan Ramazani (2009) considered the poetic imagination as connective tissue for dialogue and creative leaps across nations, hemispheres, and epochs. Transnational poetics allow for porousness where sharp boundaries had once ossified, inhibiting imaginative reversals or mergings. Ramazani (2009) wrote of the work of Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison, suggesting how her poetry indicated that the form itself “is for crossing boundaries between the living and the dead, between times, places, cultures,” that the poem is neither securely anchored in locality nor free-floating and rootless in globality, but instead a translocation—a cross-cultural, transhistorical exchange “between specific times and places” (p. 96). This conception of poetics generates connectivity and space to explore the complex matrices of our human experience and expression. If “like desire, language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries” (hooks, 1994 p. 167), then poetics that explore beyond the confinements of nationality are a natural lens through which to consider questions essential to the human; questions of how we seek out sacred belonging.

Modernity, in the words of Ramazani (2009), is a dismembering force of empire “with its insatiable appetite for new spaces and new markets,” that “severs thumbs from hands, parents from children, soft fabric from coarse” (p. 124). Experiences of separation, of finding oneself severed from vital limbs of identity and home, seem inextricable from our contemporary humanity. In this age of tragic dismembering, experiences or existences of estrangement are normative: “In definitions of modernism, ‘alienation’ is one of the most frequently invoked categories of experience” (Ramazani, 2009, p. 130). Such exilic, alienating contortions propel us to poeticize the sacred, to reach from our borderland identities (Anzaldúa, 1987) towards home.

The inverse of a disembodied, painful alienation is a steadying and pleasurable incarnate belonging. The foil of exile is Eden—the terrestrial paradise, mythical place of lush gardens, free of sin. The name *Eden* originates in the word *edinu* from the extinct Semitic language, Akkadian, borrowing from Sumerian and closely resembling the Aramaic root word for lush or abundant and well-watered (Millard, 1984, p. 103). Other interpretations of the word’s etymology stress the Hebrew base *‘dn* denoting “pleasure, luxury” along with its association with “enjoyment” (Millard, 1984, p. 104). Casually, we

use the word *Edenic* to mean idyllic and untainted, a place set apart from the pains of reality. A place green with abundance and contentment, the garden of Eden is familiar in the minds of all those acquainted with the Abrahamic religions—so much so that it transcends religious bounds, fascinating our collective, poetic consciousness.

Thus, amidst modernity's maiming torsions, it is no wonder we poeticize Eden. This paradise, conceivable yet removed, exists as a generative site for poets across time and cultural space. The Edenic imagination, as defined by Jewel Spears Brooker (2012), is one that "implies the presence of painful disjunctions and of a longing to transcend them" and "includes the consciousness of living in a moment between moments; it retains a memory, however slight, of a reality before the Fall, combined with an intuition, however faint, of the possibility of return—to home, childhood, innocence, Eden" (p. 152). Poets from a range of localities, such as John Milton, Tracy K. Smith, T. S. Elliot, Toni Morrison, Yehuda Amichai, Ina Rousseau, Pat Boran, John Donne, Ladan Osman, Robert Frost, Charles Tomilson, and Josephine Jacobsen have drawn upon Eden as a metaphor, taking up an Edenic imagination with which they explore across contradictions, lived realities, and mythological archetypes. For the purposes of this article, I have limited my inquiry to (re)searching the work of two contemporary poets—Mahmoud Darwish and Louise Glück—to consider the "time- and place-specific bearings" (Ramazani, 2009, p. 71) of Eden as a transnational metaphor for our shared humanity as well as the inextricability of Eden from exile.

Various qualitative research methodologies could have grounded my examination of exilic and Edenic human experiences; yet, I positioned this inquiry as a poetic one. First a student and teacher of poetry, I later embraced poetry as an indispensable force in my research methodology. I now understand that poems can be sites of data and that poems can enable deeper ways of knowledge-gathering than those afforded by more traditional methods. Working out of an interpretivist, rather than a positivist perspective, I considered the process of meaning-making vital (Becker 1999; Owton, 2017) as well as the viability of poetry to serve as the mode with which individuals might enact such an interpretive process.

Though poetry is a nontraditional site for the collection and study of data, the form yields a kind of layered knowledge often unafforded in traditional methods: "poems are powerful documents that possess the capacity to capture the contextual and psychological worlds of both poet and subject" (Furman, 2007, p. 302). Pursuing a deeper understanding of the kindred experiences of exile and of imagining Eden, I wanted to engage my questions in a way that only poetry—with its associative logic, embrace of porosity, and capacity for multiplicity and nuance—seemed capable of offering to the project.

Flowing out of theoretical developments in postmodernism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and feminist postmodernism, poetic inquiry works to articulate human experience by rejecting traditionally held binaries and understandings of relational power (Leavy, 2015). Poetic inquiry resonates with a phenomenological approach as it employs poetic representation “as a way of seeking to reveal something of the *essence* of people’s key experiences and as a window to view the complexities of understanding in a holistic way of knowing and being in the world” (Owton, 2017, p. 10).

Observational in nature, a poet’s first-hand sense experience of the world exists as a site of evidence-based (even empirical) knowledge (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). Similar to other arts-based methods, “poetry invites the reader to ‘step into’ another person’s experience” (Owton, 2017, p. 8). By nature of sensory language, the poet “transport[s] us to a place, time, and experience” and through to understanding (Owton, 2017, p. 8). Poetry as data allows for sensory observations and experiences to emerge in the research inquiry. As I considered the poetry of Darwish and Glück, I wanted the discussion to allow for me, and for others who might read with me, to *step into* their experiences of exile and Eden in order to arrive at an understanding more complex than what conventional study might afford. Furthermore, because this study considered boundary-crossing and transnationalism in poetic writing, poetry’s strength as the foremost means of data collection grew more apparent.

Faulkner (2020) celebrated poetry and how it defies “singular definitions and explanations, [as] it mirrors the slipperiness of identity, the difficulty of capturing the shifting nature of who we are and want to be, and resonates more fully with the way identity is created, maintained, and altered through our interacted narratives” (p. 75). My methodology embraced such shifting, slippery, interacted dimensions of experience and, thus, poetry was the form most hospitable to exploring such realities. In this I probed the dimensions of alienation in modernity, and chose poetry as the site of focus seemed a precise methodological fit.

Poetry, as the source of data, was not a means to an end but an opening, a way of attuning research to ineffable, creative, and lived realities. Centering poetry itself as the data allowed for the observational, sensory evidence to see beyond, underneath, and despite the pervasive logic of instrumentality we so often encounter in qualitative research traditions and formalized studies of poetry. This logic muddles any kind of understanding of poetry as a thing in and of itself, and of experiences with poetry as worthy in and of themselves, thus inhibiting us from experiencing poetry qua poetry—sitting, savoring, meditating, relishing in beauty/pause/exploration. I wanted to consider questions worthy of such robust engagement through poetry, hoping to avoid the potential pedantic pitfalls of studying poetry in a way divorced from any meaningful resemblance to the form itself. My study, therefore, sought to work in the form itself, not outside of, or detached from, it.

So as not to confuse the use of poetry and poetic inquiry—both of which were central to this exploration—I borrow the words of researcher Helen Owton (2017): “Whilst poetry is a craft allowing us to experiment with language, rhythm and rhyme, Poetic Inquiry is a methodological approach that seeks to reveal and communicate multiple truths via intuitive contemplation and creative expression” (pp. 8–9). In foregrounding poetry as qualitative data—considering how two contemporary poets put words to, and spaces around, their experiences of exile—I chose a method of poetic inquiry that celebrates porosity, multiplicity, and the mess of lived experiences and aimed to represent human experience in deep, meaningful ways. “Poets recognize the importance of how metaphorical thinking organizes our experience” (Faulkner, 2020, p. 146), and poetic inquiry, in this instance, also foregrounds metaphorical thinking as experience.

I began with a reading of the work of Mahmoud Darwish (1993, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2009, 2019). A poet gifted to me by my first classroom of high school students in Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem, the writing of Darwish sparked the initial inspiration for this inquiry. Years after my highly textured introduction, I started my work as a qualitative researcher wherein I read Jahan Ramazani (2009) and decided to (re)search the Darwish collection on my bookshelf: *Adam of Two Edens; The Butterfly’s Burden; Palestine As Metaphor; A River Dies of Thirst; Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*. As I did so, I began to wonder what it might look like to consider transnationalism as a lens, poems as data, and his discussion of exile in tandem with that of Glück in *The Wild Iris*—a collection I had read two years prior, and that continued to haunt me. Trained in methods of qualitative research, I began to imagine what an inquiry might look like that took these poets up as participants in a study, as if their poems were interview transcripts, or their collections an archive to sift through. How might a poetic inquiry into their work defy the ossified bounds of traditional literary analysis? I splayed Darwish’s works on my table, ordered Glück’s oeuvre, *Poems 1962-2012*, and set to (re)reading it as data—coding and categorizing—reading anew for resonance and for language around the exilic and the Edenic.

While a poetic inquirer often presents research findings as poetry, I wanted to change the approach in which I *read* poetry. Thus, I took up a slightly different angle as a poetic inquirer wherein I “analyz[ed] poetry as qualitative data” (Faulkner, 2020, p. 51) as a way of (re)reading and (re)searching. To capture the full fluidity and dialogue present between the poets and their poems, I chose to break from traditional APA formatting and stylized the data discussion in present tense. This method of (re)searching prompts the reader and researcher to dwell in liminality and to probe the ways in which Glück and Darwish explore the place and potential—the spaces *in*, *between*, and *outside of*—the Edenic and the exilic through their poetry, through the language with which they (re)render Eden. In doing so, I aim to limn the contours of a

transnational Edenic imagination, a poetics that reaches beyond fixities and alienation in search of a restful belonging.

Eden's Exclusivity

Hortus conclusus is Latin for “enclosed garden,” both words referring to enclosure. The *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture* entry listed *hortus conclusus* as “enclosed (referring to Virginity), inviolate, or secret garden” that is “associated with the Garden of Eden, but also an attribute of the Virgin Mary” (Curl & Wilson, 2021). In medieval Mary gardens, the enclosure was literal, “surrounded by hedges, wattle-fences, or walls” (Curl & Wilson, 2021). Symbolic of impenetrability and Eden, this architectural term helps frame our fascination with Eden and its seclusive purity.

Inviolability, made possible by protective walls, bespeaks inherent exclusivity and, by extension, expulsion. *Hortus conclusus* helps us to grapple with Eden as a site of simultaneous desire and exclusivity, with its propensity to expel and to guard its spatial scarcity and sanctity. We almost implicitly understand that the terrestrial garden is special in part *because* it cannot hold all of humanity. This rigidly preserved underbelly of paradise is the violence and exclusion it relies upon for preservation.

Darwish, a Palestinian poet made an exile in his own country, illuminates the scarcity, preservation, and confinement of paradise in his poem, “Not Big Enough” (2009, p. 58). The twin refrains of “a confined land” and “not big enough” haunt the poem as mechanisms of enclosure for “those seeking / to preserve their identity” and exclusion for “the uninvited guests,” a seeming punishment from a “discontented god” (p. 58). The exilic tension of the poem is in the enumeration of unrealized desires for connectivity, thwarted by barrier-laden exclusivity: no room for prophets and generals to meet, male and female doves (symbols of peace) to mate, people to discuss the precarious nature of their peace agreement, or, even, space to fight proper battles. The visions are not all of reconciliation, yet they all seek a form of authentic communion or engagement with the other, and of the possibility of transcending boundaries. Darwish writes that poetry supplies this confined land with “descriptions of / paradise to satisfy the hunger for beautiful things”—yet the hunger expressed in this poem is simultaneously more radical and more modest as it conveys a longing for a space big enough to meet, mate, discuss, and battle. A space where weapons no longer keep people from the holiness of the land.

Paradise, or Eden, as Darwish engages it in “Not Big Enough,” is a meditation on the aberrant and conspicuous nature of the ongoing, colonizing separation between humans who might otherwise commune with one another if not divided into those exiled in/from their own country and those seeking a *hortus conclusus* of a purely Jewish nation-state. Yet, too, the poem reaches for an ontologically poetic plane, hungering for

a dimension beyond the space of the poem itself, a third space, capacious enough to “elude the politics of polarity” (Bhabha, 2004, pp. 38–39) where there exists the possibility for something in-between, something transnational, to emerge.

Exile, Locality

Exile is literal for Darwish. Born in the village of Birwe in upper Galilee, Palestine, in 1942, he was exiled at six years of age when the Israeli Army occupied Birwe in 1948. As recounted in the chronology that opens Munir Akash and Daniel Moore’s English edition of *The Adam of Two Edens*, “to survive the ongoing massacres,” Darwish’s family fled to Lebanon while the “newly formed State of Israel destroy[ed] the poet’s village and, along with 417 more Palestinian villages, cleans[ed] it of its indigenous Arab population” (Darwish et al., 2000, p. 11). Birwe was promptly “erased from land and map, but remained intact in memory, the mirage of a lost paradise” (Darwish, 2003a, p. xvi). After he had been banished for 26 years, Darwish obtained a visiting permit in 1996 wherein he was warmly welcomed by fellow Palestinians, “his compatriots, the ‘internal refugees’” (Darwish, 2003a, p. xvii).

In the poem “To Our Land” (2003/2007a, pp. 203–204) Darwish underscores the precarity of Palestinians as internal refugees and of revisiting the lost paradise of his homeland, yet kept from its fullness. The title of the poem echoes as its refrain, betwixt meditations on its holiness, its “torn hills,” its blood. His land, “far from the adjectives of nouns,” is now a space sustained through the collective lament of Palestinian memory. The “map of absence” remembers the 417 other demolished villages, the Palestinian land map marked by painful absences of what was. The Palestinian’s “identity wound” mirrors the land’s “torn hills,” a people and a land unnaturally dismembered by modern colonialism.

The Edenic imagination of Darwish shines in the titles of his poetry collections, *The Adam of Two Edens* (2000) and *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* (2003), as well as in particular expressions of exile such as in “Like the Letter ‘N’ in Qur’an” (1995/2003c, p. 71) where he writes of a “we,” descendent from Adam and Eve as first parents. Crying out, “O, grandfather, I am the last of the living in this desert, so let us return,” Darwish weeps for recognition, acceptance, and reunion with the ancient homeland of his forefathers. Situated in a cosmic history tracing back to Eden, Darwish laments his grandfather’s estrangement from the land as precedence for his own—“bordered by a sea and a desert, / and both deny my grandfather and his sons.” Darwish articulates the natural symbiosis of life, lineage, and place in tandem with the pain of its unreality.

Longing for return, denied by military-checkpoint-ridden border walls, Darwish traces his familial lineage to the original inhabitants of Eden. Yet, this ancestral claim to paradise is one of “oblivion,” of unconsciousness in the face of their impending

banishment—merging the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden and the forced removal of his family from Birwe. The exilic poetics of Darwish takes storied shape as it plumbs the connectivity between ancient and modern, myth and grim reality, exile and exile. Though writing out of a “distinctly Palestinian sensibility and consciousness [and] out of the richness of Palestine’s cultural past and a belief in its common destiny,” as Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché (2003a) write in their introduction to *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, Darwish is also “a poet and citizen of the world” (p. xviii). Though Darwish knows exile intimately, his poetry extends from the specific through to the universal—inhabiting a hybrid space of poetics, a citizenship loosed of its locality.

Inverting Eden, A Prismatic Rewriting

In a 1996 conversation with Israeli poet Helit Yeshurun, Darwish stresses the exclusivity endemic to the Israeli perspective and inverts it: “Israelis claim they are the only victims, the only ones to have known genocide ... The Palestinian perspective is the opposite of exclusivity. It’s about being more than one thing and reflects a readiness to accept the other” (2019, p. xiii). Darwish’s insistence that his people are “more than one thing” embraces multiplicity and transcendence not afforded in strict fixities of politically designated identity. Yet, it is in this embrace of multiplicity, perhaps even hybridity (Bhabha, 2004), that Darwish can activate a transnational Edenic imagination that sees dynamic, overlapping, and fecund dimensions from which to create.

As poeticizing Eden indicates a position of exile and longing *for* Eden, so too does the Edenic imagination intertwine with the exilic. Edward Said (2000) writes of the “plurality of vision” of exile where an “awareness of simultaneous dimensions” forcibly exists in the imagination (p. 186). Furthering this idea, Ramazani (2009) names exile’s “double- or triple- visioned awareness [that] lends itself to poetry’s prismatic perspectivism, as embodied in its metaphoric richness and layered forms” (p. 138-139). Likewise, the dismembering of identity, though not a prerequisite, evidences the kaleidoscopic multiplicity of humanity to be more than one thing.

Louise Glück, a New York-born poet and essayist, takes up a prismatic rewriting of Eden—prismatic, in the language of Ramazani (2009), as a way of inviting “double-vision” and “layered forms” (p. 139) to see Eden differently. In “The Apple Trees,” the speaker and son “inhabit a type of apple garden anti-Eden” (Wyman, 2020, p. 140) where they look out the window to the dark trees, the speaker counting out “the whittled ribs,” urging the son to “see what you have made” (Glück, 1975/2012, p. 96). The “whittled ribs” of many Adams giving way to many Eves suggests a bleaker origin story while inverting the positionality of the players—the mother indicates that the child in the poem is responsible for the series of out-of-the-rib creations. Five years later, her inverted Eden changes tone in the five-part sequence, “The Garden” (1980/2012, pp. 99-109). Speaking through the page, the narrator tells us, “the garden admires you,” the

garden luring us to come with our lovers via smearing “itself with green pigment, / the ecstatic reds of the roses” for our sake. But for the sake of what? Direct and acerbic, the garden exists for our entertainment, pleasure, and admiration (or is it our mocking?). Glück ends the sequence by darkly subverting the Genesis story of created bodies infused with new life, an echo of the discarded, whittled ribs in the 1975 version. The final image is that of a body “wait[ing] to be claimed” in a barren field only for nothing to come—to bother, to care—“to give it form again.” Despair evoked, Glück asks the reader to “think of the body’s loneliness.” Indifferent spirits, abandoned bodies, and a garden that seems to deride more than nourish, this Eden becomes a hopeless and ironic rendering where death and a callous universe are the only remaining certainties. The origin myth as her warped muse, Glück casts an arid meaninglessness.

The Edenic imagination and inversions of Glück continue, however, with *The Wild Iris* (1992) where her Eden sequence expands to the full space of the collection. She walks the garden grounds differently, though Eden has collapsed and the book opens in despair. Blurring time and place specificity, Glück hybridizes her own garden in Vermont, the general garden image, and the allegorical paradise myth. Glück organizes her collection as a liturgical bricolage, wrought with grief—the poems progress through a year of prayers and vespers. Three speakers narrate the year in the garden with stunning triple-vision awareness inherent in “poetry’s prismatic perspectivism [and] metaphoric richness and layered forms” (Ramazani, 2009, pp. 138–139). God, flowers, and the poet join together in a multivoiced heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) teeming with pain, questioning, and slivers of fleeting hope. Helen Vendler (1993) captures this multivoicedness by teasing out the interdependent narrative prism: “As the flowers are to their gardener-poet, so is she to her gardener-god; the flowers, in their stoic biological collectivity, and their pathos, speak to her, sometimes reproachfully, as she speaks, imploringly, to her god” (p. 36). This inner dialogism extends out as well, reaching to the garden of Milton’s (1667/2020) *Paradise Lost*. In the concluding lines, Milton describes Adam and Eve going forth from the garden:

The world was all before them, where to choose
 Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
 They hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
 Through Eden took their solitary way. (p. 310,)

Adam and Eve proceed into the world with one another, restored whole, and with God. Their departure from Eden is one of rehabilitated agency, “the world was all before them.” They, “hand in hand,” hold awareness of their power to choose and the possibility of future rest. Glück reimagines the concluding lines of Milton (1667/2020, p. 310) in her final two stanzas of “The Garden” (1992, p. 16). Eve’s hand brushes Adam’s cheek in a truce, a parallel leaving—from his face, from the garden. Here, the departure, though “at the beginning of love,” is laden with a sadness they cannot neglect, though they deceive

themselves to try. The speaker comments that “they think / they are free to overlook / this sadness.” They depart without self-awareness, deluded “they cannot see themselves.” In the subsequent poem of the collection, the garden is a “poisonous field” (1992, p. 18) where Glück clarifies how her version diverges from that of Milton: “Side by side, not / hand in hand: I watch you / walking.” Her reversals are darker and lonelier, but not quite as unrelenting as her 1980 version of Eden.

In *The Wild Iris*, Glück (1992) draws heavily upon Old Testament allusions and makes frequent deployment of the noun *soul*, as in “Love in Moonlight” (p. 19). The garden metaphor and “conspicuously ecclesiastical” (Connelly, 2008, p. 3) structure of poetry-as-prayer in the collection provide fertile ground for Glück to play with the religiosity of her questions, considering eternity, soul, redemption, anguish, mortality, and resurrection. She pursues the latter through meditations on the cyclical nature of her flowers—like the titular wild iris—that suffer death each fall to be reborn in the spring. The poet addresses the mostly silent Creator as the “[u]nreachable father” in a sorrowful breath and then as the “[l]ove of my life,” moving through momentary cycles of hope, though ultimately landing in incisive lament. Drawing from the creation story of the biblical garden, Glück slices “the mist dwelling between hope and pain” (Biespiel, 1992, para. 1) with more nuanced layers of existential questioning than in her previous Edens.

Eden and Exile, A Porousness

The astringent, inverted Edens of Glück and the meditations on Palestine as Eden of Darwish illustrate the adaptability and accessibility of Eden as a metaphor that persists across boundaries of place, culture, religiosity, and poetic concern. Eden and its inverse, exile, are both contextual and ubiquitous. The situation of exile does not have to be present for poet and reader to connect to the universality of what it means to hunger for home, for the sacred, for a rest that comes with a world rightly ordered. Darwish, as quoted in Adam Shatz (2001), explains the movement between contextuality and universality in exile and Eden as metaphors:

Exile is more than a geographical concept. You can be an exile in your homeland, in your own house, in a room. It's not simply a Palestinian question. Can I say I'm addicted to exile? Maybe.

Isn't exile one of the sources of literary creation throughout history? The man who is in harmony with his society, his culture, with himself, cannot be a creator.

And that would be true even if our country were Eden itself. (p. 19)

While the Eden-exile binary functions as a less-than-porous designation of either within or without, the metaphor of a paradise we do not belong to circulates in far-reaching directions. This poetics of longing holds and creates space *in-between*

oppositional dualities, a space that theologian Geerhardus Vos (1979) framed as the *already* and the *not yet*; a third space (Bhabha, 2004) complicated by coexistent simultaneity.

Glück and Darwish suggest—through Eden—that exile is endemic to the human condition. In the introduction to *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, Akash and Forché (2003a) write that “the universal for Darwish became the private state of being, of exile not as nostalgia or status quo but as some kind of roadmap for the future of the human condition” (p. xxii). Darwish embodies this description in the poem “Hoopoe” (1993/2003b, pp. 42–43) where the definition of a “place of exile” expands to encompass longing, love, shared wine, history, thoughts, and the soul. Darwish, however, never romanticizes the realities of the exilic experience, particularly as political phenomena. Yet, even as exile is marked by the “sword that [has] been sheathed in our flesh,” Darwish broadens and (re)narrativizes its definition. Time is reoriented in exile:

To reach [the future], we broke through the walls of our present,
and it became a past in the shield of an ancient soldier.
Poetry is a place of exile.
We dream and forget where we were when we wake. (p. 43)

Divisions between past, present, and future acquiesce to porous boundaries through which the exilic reaches beyond locality and presence. So too, poetry emerges as the site for imagination and transnational hybridity. For Darwish “poetry turned into a particular type of land: one in preparation to become a place of wandering, an embodiment of nonplace” (Joudah, 2013, p. xxii). Poetry itself becomes the landscape to sketch specific and holistic alienation and despair, to refract Eden as a reflection of longing, to stand in the *in-between*.

Exile, Eden, Longing as Identity

As Adam and Eve walk the garden, they lament, “No one’s despair is like my despair—” (Glück, 1992, p. 20), to which God coldly retorts, “You have no place in this garden / thinking such things.” God prods further, caustic and questioning, “Do you suppose I care / if you speak to one another?” The design of their community, their togetherness, if it is not one of care is, at its barest, a sharing of grief so that God might know them. God, in the voice of a disappointed parent, chides that he “expected better” of his earthly progeny: “if not / that you would actually care for each other / at least that you would understand / grief is distributed / between you, among all your kind, for me / to know you.” Grief is the currency of humans, the connective tissue with which they might touch the sacred, belong in the knowing presence of the divine. In the poem, “April,” Vendler (1996) describes Glück’s God as “voicing the Keatsian belief that individual grief creates personal identity, the ‘colors’ of character” (p. 21). Suffering in

the face of a God who knows “the two creatures” only insofar as they can see how “grief is distributed” between them and all of humanity, the Edenic imagination of Glück foregrounds longing and despair as the makings of identity. In this inverted garden, *The Wild Iris* “voices an identity wrought by distinctive grief” that “enables the creation of a distinctive identity and, consequently, poetic voice” (Connelly, 2008, p. 8).

Reaching through language for relief from suffering, for a painless paradise, the poet becomes an exilic being. Glück’s grief in *The Wild Iris* is a central feature of her identity in the garden. Akash and Forché (2003a) classify Darwish with other poet-exiles that share “a certain understanding of the exilic condition of the literary art” (p. xviii). The associative space of poetry seems conducive to the dreams of Eden for the exile, experiences of perpetual separation, and longing for transcendence of a *hortus conclusus*-like fixity. As a literary form untethered from the logic of immutable narrative constraints and sequential plot coherence, poetry invites fragmentation, dream-like plays between reality and longing, layered perplexities and hybridity. As such, its space is an open field for the poet to refract the variegated dimensions of their experience and for the Edenic and the exilic to coexist, to commingle, to enter into multivoiced dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981).

In “If It Were Not For Sin,” Darwish (2009, p. 110), sets his conditions for the relationship between poetry and pain—the ways in which it is originary. Poetically framed by a conditional if-it-were-not-for refrain, Darwish considers misery, sin, the temptation of Eve, and longing for paradise as preconditions for poetry, memory, and redemption. Contrary to what Darwish imagines Adam might think, their distance from God creates a new opening, albeit one of anguish and thirst, for poetry to grow. Too, we return to his articulation of exile as a wellspring of literary creation: “the man who is in harmony with his society, his culture, with himself, cannot be a creator” (Shatz, 2001, p. 19). If we are to take Glück and Darwish as our guides, the search for Eden and its corollary expression of long-suffering banishment are requisite to inhabiting a poetic identity, to conceiving of poetry as a third, hybrid space *between*. The Edenic imaginings of Glück and Darwish reflect the lines, light, and colors of Eden as poetic prism—a space where time, locality, longing refract outward from its apex, spun in invitation for new, kaleidoscopic wholeness.

To punctuate this point, the oft-cited, “Who Am I, Without Exile?” (Darwish 1998/2007b), translated to English by Fady Joudah, employs the question in the title as its refrain—moving from the singular, “What would I do? What would I do without exile?” to the collective “and what would we do? What will we do without exile?”—declaring the inextricability of exile and identity, of the stranger and creation. The repeated wondering of Darwish propels us *into* the specificity of the Palestinian experience of alienation and *through* to the universal, through to the internal despair of Glück. Poeticizing Eden, or oasis in the case of this poem, “bridges the transhemispheric worlds inhabited and

crossed by poet” and sojourner (Ramazani, 2009, p. 90). To poeticize longing is to call upon and create some sort of experience of Eden—whether from within, without, or a third, emergent borderland of negotiation and hybridity. Simply, the condition of exile is inextricable from the condition of poeticizing Eden. Something longing in the human, something made *other*, returns again and again to this metaphor for sacred home, a microcosm of a desire for paradise.

Transnational Edenic Imagination

In a 1995 conversation with Lebanese poet, novelist, and journalist Abbas Beydoun, Darwish remarks that Genesis and Exodus, along with the Psalms and Song of Songs, “constitute an indispensable corpus to whomever aspires to busy himself with culture” (Darwish, 2019, p.14) and that “nostalgia and exile are present in the whole of classical poetry” (p. 15). Glück, too, draws richly from biblical archetypes, whether to dance with the possibility of an existing God in *The Wild Iris* or to espouse bleak, agnostic declarations of perpetual alienation. The identity of the poet, as stranger and thus imaginer of Eden, overruns the boundaries of neatly defined languages, religions, epochs, cultures, and poetic idiosyncrasies, taking on a transnational play “across the fractures between experiential and remembered, national and transnational, solitary and communal worlds” (Ramazani, 2009, p. 139). Antithetical to the exclusivity of Eden, poeticizing it again and again creates a space of sacred *in-between*—a place for the weary exile to rest their head.

The transnationality of an Edenic poetics reaches beyond the search for human community amidst alienation, from a map of absence into a prismatic existence *betwixt*. It is the imaginative remaking of reality through language, a force of (re)membering in the face of a maimed modernity. Symmetrically, poetic inquiry as a method for (re)reading and (re)searching, reading poetry as qualitative data, enables us to see and participate in the multivoiced dialogue that makes way for imaginative remakings and reversals—where we might inhabit liminality; create nuanced, sacred home in hybridity; and locate ourselves beside that which perforates fixities in life, art, and research.

Transnational Edenic poetics long for transcendence and robust belonging. May it not be so different in our research as poeticizing, in our ways of reading and (re)reading, in our searching and stitching for a more robust, variform conception of what it means to know.

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